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Data to be used for evaluating university foreign language departmental practices in the oral aspects of language usage were gathered from questionnaire responses. The study was limited to undergraduate programs in French and Spanish and involved data from 155 department heads. A list of items studied and their mean importance ratings is provided. Results obtained from current practice questionnaires are analyzed. (DS)

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The Importance and Use of Oral Language in Modern Foreign Language Departments

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ALL foreign language departments, by one means or another, evaluate themselves in order to understand their strengths and weaknesses better. This paper provides data which may be used for appraising one aspect of a program—the emphasis on oral use of the foreign language. Data presented have been extracted from a more comprehensive study[1] and applied to this one phase of program practice. Goals were (1) to establish a set of elements important to a sound program, and, (2) to examine current practices at a sample of institutions in relation to the set of elements. Data presented in this paper, then, may be used to evaluate an institution's commitment to spoken language in relation to a somewhat ideal program as well as to actual practices at several institutions. The study was limited to programs in French and Spanish on the undergraduate level.

Establishing the Set of Elements

Program elements chosen for the study consisted of items to which contemporary literature on the topic gives emphasis. Certain recommendations are repeatedly endorsed in this literature and can be assumed to be important to a program. It can also be assumed that these elements vary in degree of importance, and that information on their relative importance would be useful for priorities in program improvement. An attempt was made, therefore, to determine the relative importance of the recommended program elements by listing them in questionnaire form for submission to

[1] Theodore B. Kalivoda, "The Development and Application of a A Set of Criteria For Evaluation of Undergraduate Programs of Modern Foreign Languages" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1967).

department heads. Respondents used a five-point scale from "no importance" to "absolute importance" to rate the elements. An importance rating for each item was established by a mean score of the respondents' ratings on each item. Results of the ratings showed one item with a rating above four (between "great" and "absolute importance") and the remaining items with ratings above three (between "medium" and "great importance"). None of the items, therefore, were judged as elements of little or no importance to a modern foreign language program. This eliminated the need to exclude any items from the study because of low ratings. Items of the study and their mean importance ratings are listed below.

Extent of Oral Language Employed in Beginning Language Courses

1. Conducting beginning language courses almost totally in the target language. Rating: 3.91.

Methods of Teaching Oral Language in Beginning Language Courses

2. Withholding graphic symbols until the student has had a chance to hear and pronounce the material. Rating: 3.13.
3. Emphasizing drills on language patterns. Rating: 3.92.
4. Choral recitation as a major device for learning patterns. Rating: 3.23.
5. Using dialogs as a major drill device. Rating: 3.65.
6. Using the target language at the speed of native speakers. Rating: 3.66.

Oral Language in Testing

7. Testing beginning language students primarily on listening comprehension and speaking. Rating: 3.42.
8. Relating language testing to drills done in the laboratory. Rating: 3.80.

Oral Language in Literature Courses

9. Conducting undergraduate courses of literature in the foreign language rather than in English. Rating: 4.26.
10. Using the laboratory for listening to drama and poetry as a part of literature courses. Rating: 3.92.

These items and their scores served as a basis for comparing recommended program elements—*what ought to exist*—with actual practice—*what does exist.*

The Sample

Colleges and universities which represented various types of institutions of higher learning were desired for the sample. This characteristic was met through institutions which according to latest data available at the time had conferred the most undergraduate degrees in French and Spanish in 1962–63.[2] A total of 120 of these institutions were selected, thirty from each of four categories: private universities, state universities, liberal arts colleges, and state colleges. The sampled institutions represented thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia.

It was recognized that quantity of degrees conferred was by no means an absolute determiner of an institution's qualifications for inclusion in the sample, but it was felt that this characteristic gave some indication of the institution's experience in foreign language teaching and consequent competence to render judgments on components which make up a sound program.

Heads of departments, because of their responsibility in directing the many facets of their programs and thus being more likely to have recent experience in making judgments on desirable program elements, were selected as respondents for the questionnaire. Among the respondents were those who are commonly recognized as distinguished scholars in modern foreign language pedagogy.

More questionnaires were employed than the number of sampled institutions because some institutions had separate departments for French and Spanish. A total of 155 department heads, therefore, were sent questionnaires. Of this number, 122, or 78.8 percent, completed and returned questionnaires.

Procedures for Determining Current Practices

To determine what is actually practiced in

[2] United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, *Earned Degrees Conferred, 1962–63*, Circular No. 719 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1963).

relation to the set of important elements, a second questionnaire was mailed to the 122 respondents of the first instrument. Items were answered according to the extent which they were currently practiced by the departments' teaching personnel. That is, items either were (1) practiced to a large extent (by 50 percent or more of the teaching personnel), (2) practiced to a limited extent (by less than 50 percent of the teaching personnel), or (3) not practiced at all.

Scoring of items was done by weighting the mean scores which were established for items by the first instrument. This allowed for identifying the various degrees each item was practiced in a given department. Therefore, items practiced to a large extent, to a limited extent, and not practiced at all were assigned weights of one (1), one-half (.5), and zero (0) respectively. Final weighted values for each item were determined by the product of importance rating times the extent to which it was practiced in the department in question. A final mean score rating also was obtained for each department on the total study.

A total of eighty-eight questionnaires (72.1 percent of the sample) were completed and returned and thus used in comparing actual practices with the set of recommended elements.

Results

The maximum score possible for a department on all items was 3.69. Only four departments obtained this score. The lowest score obtained was 1.13. Table I shows scores of all of the departments.

TABLE I

MEAN SCORES OF DEPARTMENTS

High Departments	Medium Departments	Low Departments
3.69	2.87	2.24
3.69	2.85	2.22
3.69	2.84	2.16
3.69	2.83	2.11
3.53	2.83	2.07
3.50	2.82	2.06
3.49	2.81	2.06
3.49	2.75	1.98
3.49	2.67	1.95
3.49	2.66	1.92
3.37	2.63	1.87
3.30	2.63	1.85
3.30	2.62	1.85
3.21	2.61	1.76
3.19	2.60	1.71
3.19	2.59	1.68
3.16	2.59	1.65
3.15	2.57	1.56
3.15	2.55	1.53
3.14	2.49	1.51
3.13	2.47	1.36
3.12	2.46	1.33
3.12	2.46	1.31
3.11	2.44	1.17
3.10	2.30	1.13
2.99	2.88	
2.98	2.26	
2.96		
2.96		
2.96		
2.95		
2.94		
2.94		
2.93		
2.91		
2.89		

A sizeable hiatus between item importance and item practice is seen through the scores obtained. The greatest number of departments (78.65 percent) practiced "to a large extent" the conducting of undergraduate courses of literature in the foreign language rather than in English, an item given an importance rating between "great" and "absolute importance." The least number of departments (31.46 percent), on the other hand, practiced "to a large extent" the employment of the laboratory for listening to the drama and poetry of literature courses, an item having the second highest importance rating of the study. The great difference in percentage of departments practicing these two items "to a large extent" seems surprising in view of the relation of both items to the use of spoken language in literature courses as well as their having received the two highest importance ratings of the study.

Further analysis of departments as they relate to individual items was made by dividing departments into HIGH, MEDIUM, and LOW categories. This was done to allow an institution to evaluate itself with a given item of the study not only in relation to the practice of the item by all sampled institutions combined but also in relation to its practice by the HIGH,

MEDIUM, and LOW scoring institutions. Each of the categories represented one-third of the different scores obtained. Ranges in scores for the HIGH, MEDIUM, and LOW departments were 3.69–2.89, 2.87–2.26, and 2.24–1.13 respectively. Table II shows percentages under each category representing departments and the extent which they practiced each item.

In conclusion, the study produced data which may be useful in appraising a department's practices with oral aspects of language. Appraisal may be done in relation to a program consisting of important elements which were endorsed by contemporary literature and rated by 122 department heads, and also in relation to actual practice of these elements at eighty-eight different institutions. A summary of steps that may be followed in the evaluation process are listed below.

1. Determine the extent which each of the items is practiced by members of the department's teaching faculty, i.e., by more than 50 percent, by less than 50 per cent, or by none of the faculty.
2. Score each item with its mean importance rating (pp. 2–3) times one, one-half, or zero, depending on the extent of its practice by departmental personnel.
3. Obtain a total mean score of the department's ten item scores and compare it with the range of scores obtained by all sampled departments as well as by HIGH, MEDIUM, and LOW scoring departments Table I).
4. Compare the extent of each item practiced by the department with the extent of its practice by all departments of the study as well as by HIGH, MEDIUM, and LOW departments (Table II).

TABLE II

PERCENTAGES OF DEPARTMENTS PRACTICING ITEMS

Item No.	Item Importance	Extent of Item's Practice	All Departments	High	Medium	Low
1	3.91	Large	55.06	83.33	55.56	16.00
		Limited	29.21	16.67	37.04	36.00
		None	15.73	0	7.41	48.00
2	3.13	Large	37.08	75.00	14.81	8.00
		Limited	23.60	16.67	25.93	28.00
		None	39.33	8.33	59.26	64.00
3	3.92	Large	74.16	88.89	88.89	40.00
		Limited	17.98	5.56	11.11	36.00
		None	7.87	5.56	0	24.00
4	3.23	Large	59.55	83.33	51.85	32.00
		Limited	30.34	11.11	40.74	44.00
		None	10.11	5.56	7.41	24.00
5	3.65	Large	68.54	88.89	70.37	28.00
		Limited	24.72	11.11	22.22	56.00
		None	6.74	0	7.41	16.00
6	3.66	Large	64.04	88.89	51.85	44.00
		Limited	26.97	11.11	40.74	32.00
		None	8.99	0	7.41	24.00
7	3.42	Large	38.20	72.22	14.81	8.00
		Limited	44.94	22.22	66.67	56.00
		None	19.10	5.56	18.52	36.00
8	3.80	Large	55.06	80.56	48.15	16.00
		Limited	31.46	19.44	40.74	48.00
		None	13.48	0	11.11	36.00
9	4.26	Large	78.65	86.11	92.59	56.00
		Limited	16.85	13.89	7.41	28.00
		None	4.49	0	0	16.00
10	3.92	Large	31.46	44.44	37.04	8.00
		Limited	42.70	33.33	37.04	64.00
		None	25.84	22.22	25.93	28.00

On using these data a department should recognize the ratings of the elements as being derived solely from expert opinion rather than from controlled experimental tests, and therefore tentative.